

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 24038 220644Z  
ACTION EA-12

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FM MEMBASSY BANGKOK  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9742  
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E.O. 11652: NA  
TAGS: SHUM, TH  
SUBJ: THAMMASAT 18 TRIAL

REF: BANGKOK 20739

1. EMBOFF ATTENDED THE AUGUST 18 SESSION OF THE THAMMASAT 18 TRIAL. DEFENSE ATTORNEYS CONCPHIEH THEIR CROSS-EXAMINATION OF POLICE LT. COL. SALANG BUNNAG, THE EIGHTH WITNESS IN THE CASE, WHO WAS IN CHARGE OF THE POLICE ANTI-RIOT UNITS DURING THE OCTOBER, 1976, DEMONSTRATIONS AT THAMMASAT. THIS WAS THE SIXTH STRAIGHT WEEK OF TESTIMONY FOR SALANG, INDICATING THE SLOW PROGRESS OF THE TRIAL. ABOUT 100 PERSONS, MOSTLY STUDENTS, ATTENDED THE LATEST TRIAL SESSION. THE PRESS NOTED EMBOFF'S PRESENCE AT THE TRIAL.

2. ON AUGUST 5, LT. GEN. SAMING TAILANGKHA, DIRECTOR OF THE JUDGE ADVOCATE GENERAL'S OFFICE, GAVE AN INTERVIEW TO THE PRESS STATING THAT THE INCREASES TO TWO COURT SESSIONS A WEEK, BEGINNING IN OCTOBER (NOTED IN REFTTEL), SHOULD SPEED UP THE TRIAL,BUT HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE COURT

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MUST HANDLE THE CASE WITH CARE AND COULD NOT BE RUSHED. HE SAID HE HAD NO IDEA IF THE TRIAL WOULD BE COMPLETED BY NEXT YEAR. ON AUGUST 7, TONGBAI TONGBAO, DEFENSE ATTORNEY FOR THE THAMMASAT 18, SAID THE TRIAL COULD BE SPEEDED UP BY REDUCING THE NUMBER OF WITNESSES SCHEDULED TO TESTIFY.

3. EMBOFF DISCUSSED THE CASE WITH TONGBAI ON AUGUST 14. HE INDICATED HIS HOPE THAT PM KRIANGSAK WOULD END THE TRIAL QUICKLY BY GRANTING AMNESTY TO THE DEFENDANTS BUT ADMITTED HE HAD NO EVIDENCE THAT SUCH A MOVE WAS LIKELY IN THE NEAR FUTURE. IF AN AMNESTY WAS NOT FORTHCOMING, TONGBAI SUGGESTED TRANSFERRING THE CASE TO A CIVILIAN COURT AND REDUCING THE WITNESS LIST AS ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO SPEED UP THE TRIAL. (DETAILS OF THE CONVERSATION SENT IN SEPARATE MEMCON.)

4. THE MILITARY PROSECUTORS HANDLING THE THAMMASAT 18 CASE INDICATED THAT THE DEFENSE TEAM WAS PARTIALLY TO BLAME FOR THE SLOW PACE OF THE TRIAL. SINCE THERE ARE EIGHTEEN DEFENDANTS, AS MANY AS EIGHTEEN DIFFERENT LAWYERS MAY CROSS-EXAMINE EACH WITNESS.

5. COMMENT: WHILE BOTH SIDES SEEM ANXIOUS TO STEP UP THE PACE OF THE TRIAL, ANY MOVE TO SPEED UP THE TRIAL THAT MIGHT WEAKEN THEIR ARGUMENTS, SUCH AS REDUCING THE WITNESS LIST OR LIMITING CROSS-EXAMINATION, WOULD BE APPROACHED WITH GREAT CAUTION. ABRAMOWITZ

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## Message Attributes

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